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The Perilous Journey

PHOTO: JAMES KASHANGAKI

Migratory Barn Swallows in flight at the Nairobi National Park.

BY JOHN MWACHARO

Every year, millions and millions of birds undertake a perilous journey across continents in search of food and good breeding sites. This journey, often covering thousands of kilometres, is called bird migration. Not all birds manage to survive this trip, let alone returning to their home countries. Many dangers await them as they fly over land and sea.

Climate change is one of the threats facing migratory birds. Climate change is already adversely affecting weather patterns. In Europe, where many of our migratory birds come from, it is causing warmer winters and earlier springs. By the time migrant birds arrive on their breeding grounds, the first flush of new leaves and the caterpillars that feed on them may already be over, so less food is available for parent birds with babies in the nest. Here in Africa, climate change is responsible for droughts leading to desertification. Migrating birds are being forced to fly across an area of deserts which keeps on increasing every year.

Changes in land use is another threat to migrating birds. Many common birds have for thousands of years lived alongside humans. However, farming methods have changed over the past few years. Vast tracts of land have been cleared for agriculture to cater for the growing demand for food. The use of chemicals to control pests and weeds has increased. As a result, birds have been left with fewer undisturbed spaces to forage for food and nest.

Cities and towns have expanded, leaving less space for birds to feed and rest. Tall buildings, roads, railways, power lines, wind turbines, and power transmission masts also present barriers to migrating birds. Wrongly placed infrastructure has been linked to the deaths of thousands of migratory birds every year.

Illegal hunting, trapping and killing also account for these birds' population decline. Around half a billion (500 million) birds are killed by shooting or trapping as they migrate through the Mediterranean each year. Many of these birds belong to species that are already growing rare. This kind of hunting is often against the law, and against international agreements for the protection of migrating birds, but the people who do it often think they have a traditional right to kill birds.

The World Migratory Bird Day is marked each year in May and October. This day is dedicated to raising awareness on issues affecting migratory birds. It is also used to inspire people and organizations around the world to take action for the conservation of these birds. The Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) and the African-Eurasian (Migratory) Waterbird Agreement (AEWA) – two intergovernmental wildlife treaties administered by UN Environment – organize this campaign in cooperation with Environment for the Americas (EFTA). Site Support Group (SSGs) across the country's Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) joined the rest of the world in marking this day. Over 5,000 community members in Dunga Swamp, Yala Swamp, Arabuko-Sokoke Forest, Dakatcha Woodland, Tana River Delta, Kinangop grasslands, Mt. Kenya Forest, Taita Hills forests, and Mida Creek, among other sites, participated in events to commemorate the day.

Spring Alive is another awareness campaign targeting migratory birds, undertaken annually by BirdLife International partners, including Nature Kenya. Spring Alive features indoor and outdoor activities for children, schools and the wider community to promote interest in nature and the conservation of migratory birds. Participants are encouraged to visit the project website (www.springalive.net) to post their first sightings of five migratory bird species: Barn Swallow, White Stork, Common Cuckoo, Common Swift, and Eurasian Bee-eater. Through posting their records on the website, bird watchers from Europe, Central Asia and Africa help create a real-time map of the incredible journeys undertaken by these birds every year.

PHOTO: JENNIFER ODERO

Pupils from Minjila Primary School in Tana River Delta participate in a bird watching activity to mark the World Migratory Bird Day.

Kenya Breweries Limited staff and cammunity members plant trees in Njukiri forest. PHOTOS COUTESY OF OXYGÉNE MCL

Mt. Kenya Forest restoration update

The 2019 short-rains edition of the Kenya Breweries Limited (KBL) supported Mt. Kenya and Aberdare forests restoration drive kicked off in Embu county on October 18th. KBL staff under their Kijani team joined community members living adjacent to Njukiri forest in planting over 7,000 trees. Nature Kenya staff, Kenya Forest Service (KFS) officials and students from the University of Embu, Embu College and Kenya Medical Training College also participated in this event.

Three forest blocks in Mt. Kenya (Njukiri and Gathiuru) and the Aberdares (Wanjerere) have been targeted for restoration during the October-November short rains planting season under the KBL sponsored restoration initiative. Njukiri, Gathiuru and Wanjerere Community Forest Associations (CFAs) will be involved in the planting of 60,000 tree seedlings.

In May this year Kenya Breweries Limited committed Ksh.8 million for the restoration of Mt. Kenya and Aberdares forests as part of its environmental conservation efforts. The company seeks to support the planting of over 100,000 trees in 2019 and 2020. Projects funded by the World Land Trust (WLT) and the Darwin Initiative are also supporting the restoration of Mt. Kenya Forest.

CONSERVATION NEWS

WATER MATTERS

PHOTO: MERU COUNTY GOV

The Meru County Water Dialogue Forum was held at the Hotel Three Steers in Meru. The forum brought together stakeholders from the water and conservation sectors, including Nature Kenya, to discuss issues on the sustainable restoration of Mt. Kenya and Nyambene water towers, and other sources in Meru County. The dialogue was moderated by the Meru Governor H.E Kiraitu Murungi (pictured above) and his Tharaka Nithi counterpart H.E Muthomi Njuki. The Moroccan Ambassador to Kenya Dr El Mokhtar Ghambou was the chief guest. Nature Kenya was among the organizations that supported the event.

SAVING SPECIES

PHOTO: MARTIN KIAMA

The Mt. Kenya Forest site support group - Mt. KEBIO - in conjunction with the Department of Entomology, National Museums of Kenya, organized an awareness event for school pupils and community members along Thigu river. The activity aimed at sensitizing locals about a rare dragonfly species - Kenya Jewel (*Platycypha amboniensis*) which is Critically Endangered and only found in the Mt. Kenya region. Community members were encouraged to plant trees along rivers as a way of conserving the dragonfly's breeding habitat. Five hundred indigenous trees were planted during the event.

ACHIEVEMENT

David Marenya (right), a member of the Yala Ecosystem Site Support Group (SSG) poses for a photograph with Tourism and Wildlife Cabinet Secretary Najib Balala after receiving an Eco-Warrior award during the 2019 Ecotourism Kenya award gala. The Eco-Warrior awards recognize and celebrate outstanding contributians ta ecotourism practices in Kenya. Marenya emerged best in the Sustainable Tourism Change Maker category for his exemplary passion and commitment in promoting ecotourism in Siaya County through artwork. Marenya is the current chairman of the Siaya Taurism Association. PHOTO: COURTESY

For updates visit
www.naturekenya.org

EDITORIAL TEAM
Fleur Ng'weno
Gloria Waswa
John Mwacharo
Norman Kiboi
Serah Munguti

LAYOUT
John Mwacharo

FRONT BANNER
Peter Usher

NatureKenya
THE EAST AFRICA NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY
Nature-Kenya @Nature_Kenya
nature_kenya Nature Kenya

For contributions, advertising and subscriptions, contact us by:
Post: P. O. Box 44486 GPO, Nairobi
Telephone: 020 3537568/0780149200/0751624312/ 0771343138
Email: office@naturekenya.org

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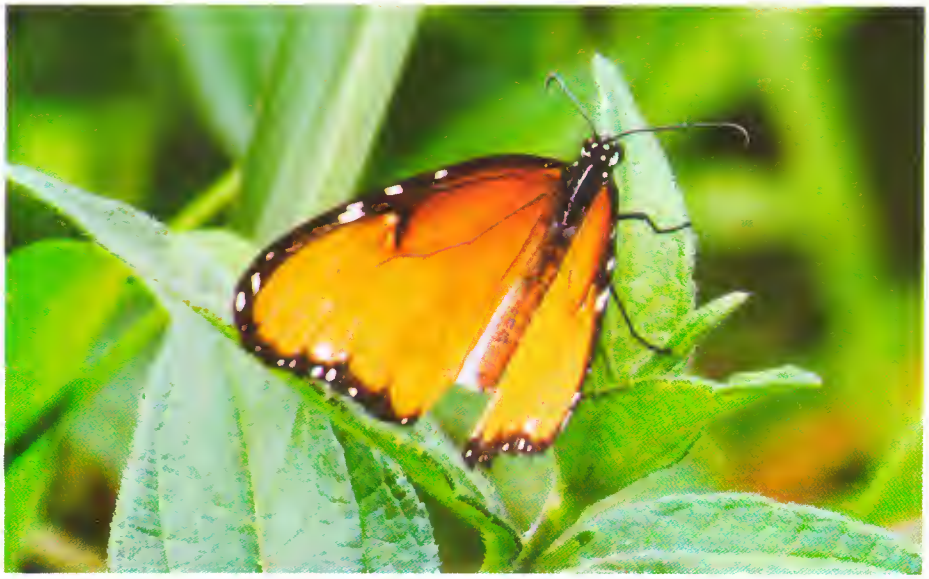

PHOTO: PETER USHER

African Monarch butterfly

Transforming the outdoors into a classroom

BY BYRON WENDO

Butterflies are among the many creatures which facilitate the pollination of flowering plants, including food crops. Collectively referred to as pollinators, these creatures significantly contribute to world food production and nutrition security. The pollinators' role is at times overlooked by most people, knowingly or unknowingly. Creating awareness on pollinators is key to their conservation. This was the basic idea behind the establishment of City Park's Pollinator Garden and Butterfly Exhibit enclosure.

The Boscowen Collection at City Park houses a collection of palms, cycads and bromeliads. The adjacent Pollinator Garden includes a variety of local flowering plants and shrubs for visitors to enjoy and learn about the importance of pollinators, and contains a small butterfly exhibit enclosure. The Nature Kenya Youth Committee has partnered with Friends of City Park and the Insect Committee to maintain the Pollinator Garden and start a butterfly breeding project. Once the project is complete, visitors will be treated to the sight of butterflies flying, feeding or just resting.

A student in Insect Ecology & Evolution, affiliated to the Insect Committee, trained the Youth Committee volunteers on basic butterfly breeding procedures and will remain in contact with them during the length of the project, offering guidance and advice as needed. The trained volunteers will breed, incubate, rear, and display butterflies as well as teach the public about these beautiful pollinators. Domestication of the entire butterfly life cycle for display and learning purposes is one of the project's primary objectives.

Butterflies will lay eggs at the garden from which caterpillars will emerge. The larvae will feed on plants before transforming into pupae, eventually emerging as adult butterflies. Since the different metamorphic stages of butterflies require a distinct set of food plants, various plants will be availed to ensure the entire process runs seamlessly. There will be host plants for laying of eggs, food plants for the caterpillars as well as flowering plants for the adult butterflies.

Journal of East African Natural History

Issue 1 for Volume 108 (2019) of the Journal of East African Natural History has been published and is now available online at: **https://www.bioone.org/journals/journal-of-east-african-natural-history/volume-108/issue-1**
Go to the link above to read the table of contents online.

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The Cleptoparasitic Bee Genus Chiasmognathus (Hymenoptera: Apidae) in Kenya, with the Description of Two New Species
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The First Confirmed Record of African Golden Cat Caracal aurata from Kenya Since 1946
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Bright planets over the sunset

BY FLEUR NG'WENO

Venus, Jupiter and Saturn put on a show over the sunset this year. As November begins, brilliant Venus is low above the western horizon, and tiny Mercury lower still. Bright Jupiter is above them, and fainter Saturn high in the west. The moon is close to Saturn on Nov 4 and 29.

Mercury will then pass between Earth and the face of the sun on November 11, tracked by many telescopes. Mercury reappears in the morning sky at mid-month, with Mars higher in the pre-dawn sky.

Venus, whose orbit is between the Earth and the sun, appears higher in the sky each evening. Meanwhile Jupiter and Saturn, whose orbits are beyond the Earth's, seem to dip towards the horizon. Venus and Jupiter appear closer and closer, passing each other on November 24. Look for Venus, Jupiter and the new crescent moon over the sunset on Nov.28!

Distant galaxies

In the south
Our sun and all the stars we see with the naked eye are part of the Milky Way galaxy. On clear dark evenings in November, we can see other, more distant galaxies. Find a viewing point where you can see low in the south, on a clear, moonless evening. High in the south, almost overhead, is the bright star Fomalhaut. Below Fomalhaut is an even brighter star, Achernar.

Below Achernar, low on the southern horizon, look for two pale areas like small round clouds. These are the Small and Large Magellanic Clouds. The two Magellanic Clouds are actually small galaxies, composed of millions of stars.

In the north
Turn around to find the bright white star Vega low in the northwest (to the right of the sunset). Higher in the north is the bright star Deneb, in the constellation Cygnus the flying swan. High above, four stars form the corners of a large square shape. This is the Great Square of Pegasus, the flying horse of the ancient Greeks.

Below Pegasus and east (right) of Deneb, is the constellation of Cassiopeia: Five bright stars forming a giant letter 'M'. Between the square of Pegasus and the M-shape of Cassiopeia, look for a blurred bright light. That bright, fuzzy spot is the Great Spiral Nebula M31, the Andromeda galaxy.

Moon, Nov '19

Nov 4: first quarter. Nov 12: full moon. Nov 19: last quarter. Nov 26: new moon.

NOVEMBER 2019 AT A GLIMPSE

Nov 2nd FoNA Tree Walk
Nov 6th Morning Bird Walk
Nov 13th Morning Bird Walk
Nov 16th FoCP Nature Walk
Nov 17th Sunday Bird Watch
Nov 20th Morning Bird Walk/Public Talk
Nov 25th FoNA Tree Walk
Nov 27th Morning Bird Walk

Bird ringing every Tuesday morning (check with Ornithology section, National Museums).

Birders Please Note! The Wednesday Morning Birdwalks meet at 8:30 am at the Nairobi National Museum. Transport is on a self-help basis. The group meets in the courtyard of the Nairobi National Museum, past the entrance to the galleries. We normally return at about 12:30 pm.

The Sunday Birdwatch on the THIRD Sunday of each month now also meets at 8:30 am, at the same location. It is a day trip; please bring water and lunch.

Mombasa Birdwalks On the 3rd Saturday of each month. For meeting time and place, please contact Taibali Hamzali <thamzali@gmail.com> / 0733-980540; or Doris Schaule <dorischaule@gmail.com> / 0722-277752. Or check Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/FFJmombasa/>

Contact the office for information on other birdwalks in Kakamega, Kisumu, and other sites

Ngong Forest walks - 1st and 3rd Saturday at 9.00 am. Contact Simon 0729-840715

3-Days camping trip to Samburu National Reserve
12TH - 14TH DECEMBER 2019
Join us and explore the reserves inspiring landscape, watch wildlife (some of the Big five, Reticulated Giraffe, Somali Ostrich, Grevy's Zebra, Besia Oryx) & Bird watching
COST KSH 12,500PP
Cost includes:
-Food & Drinking water
-Services of a professional guide
-Transport in a Safari vehicle
-Camping equipment
Excluded
-Gate fees
-Camping fee
PAY BILL 100300
Acc: Samburu trip
Contact: news@naturekenya.org or
Pay by 5th December 2019 to reserve your spot.

BIRDS OF TANA RIVER DELTA 2020 CALENDAR

Get a free **'Birds of Tana River Delta'** 2020 calendar when you either:

- Recruit a new member
- Renew your membership, or
- Purchase goods worth Ksh 2,000/- from our Nature Kenya shop

Yes! Start my **Nature**Kenya membership

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MEMBERSHIP TYPES
Ksh Per Year

Full	2,000
Sponsor	6,000
Family	2,800
Student	1,200
Schools, Clubs	1,500
Corporates	20,000 -30,000

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JOIN/RENEW MEMBERSHIP

- Select **'Lipa na Mpesa'**
- Select **'Pay Bill'**
- Enter business number **100300**
- Enter account number **(put your lapsed membership number or write new member)**
- Enter the amount, enter your PIN
- Confirm details & press OK

For details on associated groups such as Youth Committee, Succulenta, and Friends of Nairobi Arboretum, City Park or Arabuko-Sokoke Forest, contact office@naturekenya.org